1/16/04

Finding of No Significant Impact and Decision for Nicarbazin Field Study to Reduce Hatching of Eggs Laid by Local Canada Goose Flocks

The U.S. Department of Agriculture, Animal and Plant Health Inspection Service (USDA-APHIS), Wildlife Services (WS), National Wildlife Research Center (NWRC) is the Federal institution devoted to research towards resolving problems caused by the interaction of wild animals and humans. NWRC's mission is to apply scientific expertise to the development of practical methods to resolve these problems and to maintain the quality of the environments shared with wildlife. WS activities are conducted in cooperation with other federal, state, and local agencies, as well as private organizations and individuals.

Ordinarily, according to APHIS procedures implementing the National Environmental Policy Act (NEPA), individual wildlife damage management (WDM) actions, research, developmental activities maybe categorically excluded (7 CFR 372.5(c), 60 Fed. Reg. 6000-6003, 1995). WS prepared an environmental assessment (EA) to comply with APHIS NEPA implementing regulations and interagency agreements, to facilitate planning, interagency coordination, streamline research, and involve the public.

WS' proposed action is to conduct a study in Oregon to determine the effectiveness of nicarbazin as an antifertility agent in Canada geese.

Public Involvement

NWRC was mandated by Congress to research and develop contraceptive methods for a variety of overabundant avian species, including the Canada goose, and was given appropriations to conduct such studies. NWRC has determined from research and literature reviews that the compound nicarbazin has the potential to be an effective contraceptive drug that could be used safely with minimal environmental effects. NWRC has met with concerned groups such as the effected public in areas where damage from overabundant Canada geese is occurring, end-product users, animal welfare organizations, environmental organizations, and others since the funding for these projects were appropriated. Most are very much in favor of contraceptives. In addition, NWRC research projects are posted on the internet. For this reason, it has been determined that the public has been involved with this research. This Finding of No Significant Impact (FONSI) and Record of Decision (ROD) will be sent with the Environmental Assessment (EA) to interested parties. In addition, a legal notice will be printed in the Oregonian, a paper with statewide distribution where the research project is going to take place.

Public Comments

NWRC will consider all public comments that are received regarding the nicarbazin research to be conducted in Oregon. If new significant issues or concerns arise that had not been addressed in the EA, these would be considered and mitigated.

Major Issues

Cooperating agencies, the public, and WS Operations and NWRC staff helped identify a variety of issues deemed relevant to the scope of this EA. These issues were consolidated into 3 primary issues that were considered in detail in the EA and 7 that were not considered in detail with justification. The 3 issues considered were:

1. Effects on Target Canada Goose Populations.
2. Effects on Nontarget Egg-laying Species' Populations, Including T&E Species.
3. Effects of Nicarbazin on Public Safety.

The 7 issues that were considered but not in detail with justification were the toxic effects of nicarbazin to nontarget animal, the effects of nicarbazin on the environment including soils, water, and plants, the humaneness of methods used by WS Operations and NWRC, the appropriateness of the geographic scope of the EA, concerns that the proposed action may be "highly controversial" and its effects may be "highly uncertain," WS's impact on biodiversity, and the impacts of limiting Canada geese on the public's aesthetic enjoyment. A discussion of these is included in the EA.

Alternatives Analyzed in Detail

Two potential alternatives, the No Action and Proposed Action Alternatives, were developed to address the issues identified above. A detailed discussion of the anticipated effects for the issues identified above as related to the nicarbazin research project were discussed in detail in Chapter 4 of the EA. The following summary provides a brief description of each alternative and its anticipated impacts. Table 4-1 in the EA summarizes the environmental consequences (issues) of each of the alternatives in a table format. Alternatives considered but not analyzed in detail were the use of other contraceptive drugs and conducting the study elsewhere. A discussion of why these were not considered can be found in the EA.

Alternative 1 - No Action - No Study. The No Action Alternative is the status quo. Under this Alternative, a research study on nicarbazin would not be conducted. Consideration of the No Action alternative is required under 40 CFR 1502.14(d), and provides a baseline for comparing the potential effects of the other alternatives. In this EA, the "No Action" alternative is consistent with CEQ's definition.

Under this Alternative, a study to determine the effectiveness of nicarbazin as an infertility agent would not be conducted. Canada goose damage management would continue to be done with methods already in use, but a contraceptive drug would be unavailable. The Canada goose population and associated property damage in many urban areas would continue to escalate. Escalating Canada goose populations also represent a threat to the public from aircraft strikes, potential for disease, and personal injury. Natural resources will also suffer greater damage with escalating populations.

Alternative 2 - Proposed Action - Conduct the Study. This alternative consists of conducting a study to determine the effectiveness of nicarbazin baits as a contraceptive for the escalating population of "resident" Canada geese in the United States. Nicarbazin has been found to be an effective contraceptive for Canada geese in a laboratory setting and, therefore, needs to be tested in the field.

The proposed action is not expected to have any significant negative effects. If it is effective at maintaining a Canada goose population at a desired level in a particular area, it could provide beneficial impacts. Maintaining a population at a low level would keep damage to property and natural resources at an

Decision

I have carefully reviewed the EA and believe the issues and objectives identified in the EA would be best addressed through implementation of Alternative 2, the proposed action. Alternative 2 is therefore selected because the nicarbazin study to determine its effectiveness at providing a contraceptive bait for Canada geese: (1) would be consistent with the mission and objectives of NWRC's research activities; (2) would be consistent with the desires of Congress, resource owners, and the interested public; (3) will add to the methods available for Canada goose damage management, if it is determined to be effective; (4) offers a humane approach for Canada goose damage management; (5) has minimal risks to the public the environment, and nontarget and T&E species, especially when WS Operations and NWRC personnel abide by the mitigation measures listed in Chapter 3 of the EA.; and (6) is within current program funding constraints.

For additional information regarding this decision, please contact Dr. Kimberly Bynum, USDA-APHIS-WS-NWRC, 4101 La Porte Avenue, Fort Collins, CO 80521-2154, (970) 266-6000.

Mark E. Tobin 12/15/03

Acting for Dr. Richard Curnow, Director — Date
APHIS-WS National Wildlife Research Center

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